SECOND CORPS

(11,247 MEN / 28 GUNS)

MAJOR GENERAL WINFIELD SCOTT HANCOCK

Winfield Hancock certainly looked the part of a high-ranking officer. The observant staffer Frank Haskell saved his highest superlatives for the 6' 2" Second Corps chief. Of all the army's officers, Haskell believed "Hancock was. . .in many respects the best-looking, dignified, gentlemanly and commanding. He was tall and well proportioned, had a ruddy complexion, brown hair, and he wore a mustache and a tuft of hair upon his chin . . . . Had General Hancock worn citizen's clothes, and given commands in the army to those who did not know him, he would be likely to be obeyed at once, for he had the appearance of a man born to command." Another officer wrote that "one felt safe to be near him." Others were impressed with his sartorial splendor; a Maine artilleryman wrote that "his very atmosphere was strong and invigorating. . . . I remember (how refreshing to note!) even his linen clean and white, his collar wide and free, and his broad from his firm, finely molded hands." Grant himself recalled him as having been "tall, well-formed and. . .young and fresh-looking, he presented an appearance that would attract the attention of an army as he passed. His genial disposition made him friends, and his personal courage and his presence with his command in the thickest of the fight won for him the confidence of troops serving under him. No matter how hard the fight, the Second Corps always felt that their commander was looking after them."

Hancock was born and raised in Norristown, Pennsylvania, less than 100 miles from Gettysburg. As a schoolboy he showed a fondness for things military and organized a military company among his schoolmates. He entered West Point at sixteen and graduated in 1844, 18th out of 25 cadets. After a two-year hitch in Texas, he acquired battle experience in the Mexican War. When the endless routine of army posts drove many other officers back into civilian life, he stayed in the army and accumulated additional experience while serving in the Mormon Expedition and the Seminole War. One observer wrote, "he loved 'papers,' rejoicing in forms and regulations and requisitions." Thus in the years between 1850 and 1861, Hancock developed another laudable trait when he learned to appreciate attention to detail. He ended his pre-war career as a captain in command of the quartermaster's depot in Los Angeles. There, he presided at a legendary farewell dinner for his friends Albert S. Johnston, Lewis Armistead, and other officers who had resigned to "go South" after Fort Sumter

The War Department made Hancock a brigadier general in the first fall of the conflict. He differed from most Regular Army officers in that he liked volunteer soldiers and did his best to make them feel equal in importance to Regular troops, and his men repaid him for that attitude. His mixed brigade of Pennsylvania, New York, Wisconsin, and Maine soldiers fought so well during the

that Maj. Gen. George McClellan telegraphed, "Hancock was superb today." The adjective stuck in the public mind and he would later campaign for president as "Hancock the Superb" nearly thirty years later.

At Antietam in September 1862, Hancock's brigade was held in reserve with the rest of the Sixth Corps. While the battle was raging, Hancock was chosen to replace the fatally wounded Maj. Gen. Israel Richardson in command of the First Division, Second Corps. Hancock arrived after the division's attack on the enemy center had lost its momentum, and he merely presided over the men while they held their position in the Sunken Road. Promoted to major general on November 29, 1862, Hancock led Richardson's old division into battle for the first time at Fredericksburg, where he was ordered to make a futile attack into the teeth of the Confederate defenses on Marye's Heights. A bullet went through his coat and grazed his abdomen, and two thousand of his men were shot down in the slaughter before the stone wall lining the base of the heights.

The following spring at Chancellorsville, Hancock and his division performed brilliantly while covering the withdrawal of the army on May 2. He was struck with several small spent shell fragments although he remained on the field. When Maj. Gen. Darius Couch, the leader of the Second Corps, refused to continue serving under army commander Joe Hooker, the thirty-nine-year-old Hancock was the obvious choice to replace Couch at the head of the corps. He was officially given command on May 22, just six weeks before Gettysburg.

Hancock looked, acted, and sounded like a soldier. He had a loud bull voice, and in an army of expert swearers, multiple witnesses testified that Hancock had an unrivaled command of the profane idiom—he was the champion of precise cursing, used effectively and with vigor. His men liked to relate that "the air was blue all around him" as he galloped along his lines while ordering his troops to charge at Williamsburg. One colonel said Hancock "always swore at everybody, above all on the battlefield." At Chancellorsville, Hancock had started a habit of placing regiments in important positions in person. He would vault from his horse, grab the first man at one end of the regiment's front line, physically plant the soldier firmly on the desired spot and roar, "Will you stay here?" Hancock would then align the regimental colors on the shaken and often dumbstruck enlistee, order the rest of the unit into line, remount, and ride off.

While it is true that he had commanded the corps for only a few weeks at Gettysburg, "Hancock's men" were already familiar with him as the major general of their First Division. In addition to being a great natural leader of troops, Hancock was an excellent tactician. General Grant later remarked that he knew of no blunder Hancock had made on the battlefield. Although outranked by all the other infantry corps commanders except the Fifth Corps' Maj. Gen. George Sykes, Hancock was Major General Meade's most highly trusted friend and subordinate. At Gettysburg Hancock wore a black felt slouch hat "stiff enough for the brim and crown to hold their shapes," an officer's undress uniform coat buttoned at the top and open at the waist, a sword belt under the coat, and a field and staff officer's sword.

GETTYSBURG: Hancock was at the top of his game in early July 1863, and no other Union general at Gettysburg dominated men by the sheer force of their presence more completely than Hancock. His presence and direction were crucial on all three days of the battle. Rarely in warfare has the arrival of one man on a battlefield been more timely and consequential than Hancock's arrival at Gettysburg on July 1. Maj. Gen. Carl Schurz of the Eleventh Corps saw Hancock arrive with Meade's orders and testified, "The appearance of General Hancock at the front was a most fortunate event. . .It gave the troops a new inspiration. . .His mere presence was a reinforcement, and everybody on the field felt stronger for his being there." Abner Doubleday, another major general at the scene, agreed: "Hancock was our genius, for he at once brought order out of confusion and made such admirable dispositions that he secured the ridge and held it." One of Hancock's subordinates painted the same picture. Before he came, "wreck, disaster, disorder, almost the panic that precedes disorganiza-

tion, defeat and retreat were everywhere." After he appeared on Cemetery Hill, "soldiers retreating stopped, skulkers appeared from under their cover, lines were reformed." An artilleryman could never forget the "inspiration of his commanding, controlling presence, nor the fresh courage he imparted. . . ."

Meade arrived to assume control in the middle of the night, and on the morning of July 2, Hancock's Second Corps arrived and was posted in the Union center, from Cemetery Hill a mile or so south to where Maj. Gen. Daniel Sickles's Third Corps took over. At the climax of the afternoon fighting, when Lt. Gen. James Longstreet's attack rolled forward toward the Round Tops, Meade learned that Sickles had been wounded. He immediately put Hancock in command of the Third Corps, placing him effectively in control of all the Union troops from Cemetery Hill to Little Round Top. Hancock set about improvising a defense which held back the enemy throughout the late afternoon and early evening. He seemed to be everywhere at once, placing regiments by hand as he had done at Chancellorsville, and directing desperate charges by individual regiments—such as the heroic self-destruction of the 1st Minnesota.

Much to the South's misfortune, Pickett's Charge, which was launched on the afternoon of the battle's third day, was aimed squarely at Hancock's line. The general was constantly in view of his men during the attack, inspecting his lines and remaining close at hand to respond as quickly as possible to any emergencies. Even as the war's most famous assault headed directly toward his command, Hancock still managed to exceed his authority, giving orders to Maj. Gen. Newton's troops and Brig. Gen. Henry Hunt's cannoneers. In the final stages of the fighting, while riding over to Brig. Gen. George Stannard's First Corps brigade to give it an order, Hancock was severely wounded in the front of the right thigh. Although the injury put him out of action, the last of the Confederate attackers were turned back only a few minutes later, ending the battle.

At first Hancock thought he had been shot with a ten-penny nail. It was, in fact, a bullet, which had hit the pommel of his saddle and carried splintered pieces of wood and the nail into the wound. A tourniquet was made from a handkerchief and twisted with a pistol barrel to stop the flow of blood. A surgeon on the field probed the wound with his finger and removed the nail and bits of wood. Hancock would never be the same again. After a lengthy and painful recuperation, he returned to the Second Corps in December 1863. Riding a horse, however, aggravated and reopened the wound. It continued to seep blood and fluid for the next year, forcing him from the field for weeks at a time. He finally retired from active duty during the Petersburg siege in November 1864.

Hancock was promoted to major general in in 1866 and remained in various departmental commands until he ran for president in 1880, an election he lost narrowly to James Garfield. He died six years later of an infected boil, complicated by diabetes, while still in command of the Department of the East.

For further reading:

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First Division

(3,320 men)

Brigadier General John C. Caldwell

John Caldwell, a young man of thirty at Gettysburg, was one of those rare individuals who rose to divisional command despite having no acquaintance with military affairs before the war. Nor did he have much battle experience leading a division prior to the Get-